

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Oxford County Anniversaries

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Corporate Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Report CS 2025-01 titled “Oxford County Anniversaries” be received as information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- 2025 represents a significant chapter in Oxford County’s history celebrating its 175th anniversary since incorporation, and its 50th anniversary since restructuring. In addition, both Oxford County Archives and Oxford County Library are celebrating milestones, with the Archives celebrating 25 years since its inception and the Library 60 years since the County Library system was formed.
- To commemorate these milestones, Oxford County Archives and Oxford County Library have a series of events, exhibits, videos, and a publication planned to promote the County’s rich history over the last 175 years and to celebrate the achievements, resilience, and spirit that defines Oxford County.

Financial Impact

Events and promotional materials highlighting the County’s 175th anniversary, Oxford County Library’s 60th anniversary, and the Oxford County Archives 25th anniversary, have no financial impact beyond what was approved in the current year’s operating budget.

Communications




Over the year, Oxford County’s anniversaries, as well as corresponding events and outreach initiatives will be highlighted on the County’s, Oxford County Archives’ and Oxford County Library’s respective webpages and social media platforms.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council's vision of "Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future." These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendation in this report supports the following strategic goal.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
		Goal 3.2 – Collaborate with our partners and communities

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

History of Oxford County

In 1849, the *Municipal Corporations Act*, more commonly known as the *Baldwin Act* (named after the politician Robert Baldwin), established counties as units of local government. In doing so, each county in Ontario was designed to be composed of representatives from the elected councils of the lower-tier townships within each county.

With the *Baldwin Act* in place, the District of Brock became the incorporated County of Oxford, effective January 1, 1850. In doing so, the Municipality of Nissouri was split, with West Nissouri becoming part of Middlesex County and East Nissouri forming part of Oxford County and in the east of the County, Burford and Oakland Townships were annexed to Brant County.

Over the next 125 years, Oxford saw a rapid growth in industry and population, as well as several geographic transformations related to Township boundaries. Oxford County residents

also faced two world wars and the Great Depression, which impacted not only the local economy, but families on a personal front.

On June 28, 1974, the Act to restructure Oxford County received royal assent, titled the County of Oxford Act, 1974. The Special Inaugural Meeting of the Municipal Council of the County of Oxford took place on January 21, 1975. This was a historic moment for the County since it was the first restructured County in the Province of Ontario. From this point on, the geographic boundaries of the County have remained the same, which includes the following eight area municipalities:

- The City of Woodstock
- Town of Ingersoll
- Town of Tillsonburg
- Township of Blandford-Blenheim
- Township of East Zorra-Tavistock
- Township of Zorra
- Township of Norwich
- Township of South-West Oxford

Over the next 50 years, Oxford County flourished, boasting vibrant villages, towns, and Area Municipalities all of which continue to see population increases and industrial development. In 2008, Oxford County built its present administration building which is symbolic of the County's growth and progress. More recently, the County was impacted by a worldwide pandemic which significantly impacted the operations of municipal governments, businesses, community organizations, and the daily lives of residents.

Looking to the present and future, Oxford County embraces innovation and sustainability as it relates to climate change and zero waste, while also addressing systemic challenges such as the housing crisis, income insecurity, an aging population and the well-being of its residents. Oxford County's population is also expected to grow substantially by 2061, with anticipated "interprovincial migration" which will further alter Oxford County's landscape, economy, and demographic makeup.

Oxford County Library

The Oxford County Library (OCL) formed in January 1965, becoming the second county library in the Province to form after changes to Ontario's *Public Libraries Act* in 1959 made county libraries possible. The new county-wide library system would serve all municipalities except Woodstock, Ingersoll, and Tillsonburg, which had voted to keep their municipal library boards. The new Oxford County Library comprised seventeen branches (Beachville, Brownsville, Burgessville, Drumbo, East Oxford, Embro, Harrington, Hickson, Innerkip, Kintore, Mount Elgin, Norwich, Otterville, Plattsville, Princeton, Tavistock and Thamesford) and seven deposit stations (Bright, Brooksdale, Dereham, Salford, Springford, Sweaburg, and Uniondale).

In 1969, Ingersoll joined the Oxford County Library system, serving the public from the Carnegie building at 1 Charles Street East. In 1996, the Carnegie building closed with the opening of 130 Oxford Street, a shared facility between the Library and the Town of Ingersoll.

Tillsonburg is the most recent municipality to join the county system in 2013, serving the members of Tillsonburg from 2 Library Lane after renovations to the branch were completed that year.

Today, Oxford County Library serves seven of the area municipalities that make-up Oxford County, with branches located in Brownsville, Burgessville, Embro, Harrington, Ingersoll, Innerkip, Mount Elgin, Norwich, Otterville, Plattsville, Princeton, Tavistock, Thamesford and Tillsonburg. With a vision to “connect, discover, share, and become”, OCL focuses on providing universal access to reading, culture, technology, trusted information and creative learning opportunities.

Oxford County Archives

A resolution of County Council, dated October 27, 1999, created the Oxford County Archives effective January 1, 2000. Originally located in the former St. Anthony’s Elementary School in Beachville, the Archives moved to its present location in the old Gaol Governor’s House at 82 Light Street, Woodstock, in 2011.

The Oxford County Archives is a well-respected “total” Archives and is the official repository of the County’s Council and corporate records, as well as those of five of the County’s area municipalities. In addition, its holdings including over 300 fonds from local community groups, businesses, and individuals, as well as a large photograph and postcard collection, documenting the County’s history.

Over the last 25 years, Archives staff have been committed to preserving and promoting Oxford County’s total archival heritage and look forward to continue developing and improving services to preserve and celebrate the County’s history.

Comments

In 2025, Oxford County Archives and Oxford County Library have planned several events and activities to invite Council, staff, and the community to join in commemorating these significant milestones. Such anniversary celebrations include:

- 4 Exhibits in the OCAB lobby
- Exhibit at Woodstock Art Gallery
- Exhibit at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in Toronto (application pending)
- Local history speaker series held at various Oxford County Library branches
- Staff engagement through an internal intranet, communications, and activities
- Archives publication, in conjunction with community contributors, highlighting the County’s history over the last 175 + years; and corresponding book launch
- Archives video series titled, “Who Do You Think You Are” sharing genealogical stories of several County Councillors
- Hosting the Municipal Archives Interest Group’s (MAIG) Fall Open House
- Social media campaigns

- a pop-up banner celebrating historical milestones for the Oxford County Library to be used at events throughout the year.
- an online “memory wall” for sharing people’s memories of the Oxford County Library
- a short video about the history of the Oxford County Library
- an Oxford County Library celebratory event to be held in Fall 2025

CONCLUSIONS

From its establishment as a municipal corporation in 1850 to the present day, Oxford County has flourished, shaped by the contributions of generations past and present. As we honour our rich history in 2025, we look to not only acknowledge our hardships and adversities, but commemorate our developments and achievements, while at the same time embrace the promise of the next 175 years.

SIGNATURES

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